

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 AF-06 EUR-12 ISO-00 IO-11 CIAE-00 DODE-00

PM-04 H-02 INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01

SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 OMB-01 SAJ-01 SAM-01 ACDA-05 /094 W

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P R 101740Z FEB 76

FM AMEMBASSY RABAT

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 7657

INFO AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA

AMEMBASSY ALGIERS PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY AMMAN

AMEMBASSY BAMAKO

AMCONSUL CASABLANCA

AMEMBASSY DAKAR

AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM

AMEMBASSY MADRID

AMEMBASSY NOUAKCHOTT

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI

AMEMBASSY TUNIS

AMCONSUL TANGIER

USMISSION USUN

USCINCEUR VAIHINGEN GERMANY

CINCUSNAVEUR LONDON

FOSIF ROTA

COMSIXTHFLT

C O N F I D E N T I A L RABAT 0743

USCINCEUR AND CINCUSNAVEUR ALSO FOR POLADS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR PBOR MO SS SP MR AG

SUBJECT: SAHARA ROUNDUP

1. SUMMARY: GOM SUPPORTS CAIRO-SPONSORED FONMIN MEETING, BUT
COOL ON EVENTUAL SUMMIT. IN ANY CASE, GOM PRECONDITION FOR ANY
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MEETING IS ALGERIAN ACCEPTANCE MOROCCAN SOVEREIGNTY IN SAHARA.

IN RETURN, GOM HINTS AT JOINT EXPLOITATION RICHES OF "REGION", WHICH MAY MEAN SAHARA AS WELL AS GARA DJEBILET. MEANWHILE, ONE UNCONFIRMED REPORT ALLEGES ALGERIAN EVACUATION OF MAHBES AND KICKOFF OF GOM MOVE TOWARD THAT OBJECTIVE. IN ABSENCE ACCORD, WE SEE POSSIBILITY THAT MAURITANIA MAY INCREASINGLY BEAR BRUNT OF POLISARIO ATTENTION. END SUMMARY.

2. GOM DEFINES NEGOTIATING POSITION. MININFO BENHIMA'S REMARKS IN PARIS ON MOROCCAN-ALGERIAN NEGOTIATIONS WIDELY PLAYED IN LOCAL PRESS FEB 10. BENHIMA SAID GOM SUPPORTS EGYPTIAN PROPOSAL FOR CAIRO-SPONSORED FONMIN MEETING ON SOLE CONDITION THAT ALGERIA RECOGNIZE MOROCCAN SOVEREIGNTY IN SAHARA. SEMI-OFFICIAL PRESS RELEASE WENT ON TO NOTE BENHIMA SEEMED TO EXCLUDE POSSIBILITY OF SUBSEQUENT SUMMIT. HE QUOTED AS SAYING IF FONMINS ARRIVE AT AN AGREEMENT, NO SUMMIT NEEDED, AND IF MINS DO NOT AGREE, SUMMIT WOULD NOT BE HELD SOON IN ANY CASE. IN RETURN FOR ALGERIAN ACCEPTANCE OF MOROCCAN CONDITION, BENHIMA HINTED THAT GOM READY UNDERTAKE JOINT MOROCCAN/ALGERIAN INVESTMENT IN "RICHES AND POTENTIALITIES OF THE REGION" WHICH "COULD RESULT IN OPENING A FLOURISHING FUTURE FOR THE WHOLE REGION." BENHIMA WARNED, HOWEVER, "THERE NO ROOM FOR TALK OF SELF-DETERMINATION OR CHANGING OF THE MAP" OF SAHARA.

3. SAHARA SWEEP CONTINUES, MIXED SIGNALS ON MAHBES. SEMI-OFFICIAL PRESS SILENT FEB 10 ON POSSIBLE FURTHER GOM MILITARY MOVES IN SAHARA FOLLOWING OCCUPATION OF BIR LAHLOU (RABAT 0715) BUT USUALLY WELL INFORMED CORRESPONDENT OF ISTIQLAL'S L'OPINION, WHO CURRENTLY IN SAHARA, WROTE FEB 10 THAT THERE EVIDENCE THAT ALGERIANS HAVE EVACUATED MAHBES. DISPATCH ALSO QUOTED SENIOR MOROCCAN OFFICIAL IN SAHARA AS PROMISING "VERY IMPORTANT INFORMATION" WITHIN NEXT FOUR DAYS. CORRESPONDENT SAID MOROCCAN FORCES, ON FEB 9, HAD LAUNCHED "VAST AND FINAL SWEEP" ON MAHBES REGION.

4. DIPLOMATS KEEP EXCHANGING MESSAGES. MALIAN FONMIN SISSOKO SAW KING FEB 6 AND DEPARTED FOR NOUAKCHOTT SAME DAY. HE ACCOMPANIED BY MALIAN AMB TO PARIS. RADIO RABAT QUOTED SISSOKO AS SAYING HE "CONVINCED BY VIEWS OF KING ON (SAHARA) QUESTION." SUDANESE AMB TO RABAT ARRIVED FROM KAHRTOUN FEB 6 ALSO CARRYING MESSAGE FROM PRESIDENT NUMEIRY TO KING ON SAHARA. SUDANESE AMB IN CONFIDENTIAL

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STATEMENT TO PRESS SAID PURPOSE OF MESSAGE WAS TO EASE TENSIONS, NOTING THAT SUDANESE POSITION ON QUESTION "HAS ALWAYS BEEN CLEAR" (I.E., PRO-GOM). WE NOTE OAU SECGEN ETEKI ARRIVAL ALGIERS FEB 8. NO INFO HERE AS TO WHETHER HE TO VISIT RABAT.

5. PRESS AND ALGERIA. SEMI-OFFICIAL PRESS PROMINENTLY FEATURED

ANOTHER STATEMENT BY ALGERIAN OPPOSITIONIST EXILE MOHAMED LEBJAQUI (SEE RABAT 0513). IN RADIO STATEMENT, LEBJAQUI AGAIN CAME DOWN HARD ON BOUMEDIENE, CHARGING THAT HIS INTERNAL ISOLATION GROWING. HE ALSO CRITICIZED BOUMEDIENE FOR "SACRIFICING" ALGERIAN SOLDIERS IN "FACTRICIDAL" OPERATIONS AND CONTRASTED THIS WITH KING HASSAN'S DECISION TO TREAT ALGERIAN PRISONERS WELL.

6. LOCAL PRESS HAS ALSO PREDICTABLY TAKEN ISSUE WITH ALGIERS' EL MOUDJAHID FOR CLAIMING THAT OUJDA AND MARRAKECH ONCE BELONGED TO ALGERIA. L'OPINION FEB 10 SNEERED AT ARTICLE'S CHARGE THAT TARIK IBN ZYAD AND YOUSSEF IBN TACHFIN WERE ALGERIANS.

7. USFP'S AL MUHARIR FEB 9 ACCUSED ALGERIA OF TURNING ON MAURITANIA, HAVING BEEN UNSUCCESSFUL IN BUDGING MOROCCAN WILL THROUGH DIPLOMACY OR FORCE. THE GOAL OF THIS CAMPAIGN, ARTICLE ALLEGED, IS TO SPLIT MOROCCO AND MAURITANIA AND TO THREATEN MOROCCO BY SEPARATING THE MAURITANIAN PORTION OF THE SAHARA. ARTICLE NOTED MOROCCO'S ASSISTANCE TO MAURITANIA IN LA GUERA, DAKHLA, AND INSIDE NORTHERN MAURITANIA AND CALLED FOR FURTHER STRENGTHENING OF RELATIONS BETWEEN THE TWO COUNTRIES IN ANTICIPATION OF FURTHER ALGERIAN PRESSURES AGAINST GIRM. MOROCCO HAS BEEN FAITHFUL TO MAURITANIA SINCE "NEW YORK AGREEMENT", EDITORIAL MAINTAINED, AND MUST BE EVEN MORE GENEROUS AND FAITHFUL IN FUTURE IN ORDER TO "SAVE" ALL OF SAHARA.

8. BUSINESS AS USUAL IN SAHARA. PERHAPS FOR BENEFIT OF VISITING UN EMISSARY RYDBENK, GOM ANNOUNCED FEB 9 THAT BOU CRAA PHOSPHATE EXCAVATION HAD RESUMED THAT DAY. ANOTHER STORY ANNOUNCED INAUGURATION OF REGULAR AIR SERVICE TWICE WEEKLY FROM DAKHLA BY ROYAL AIR INTER, MOROCCO'S INTERNAL CARRIER. COVERAGE RYDBECK VISIT IN FEB 10 PRESS LAREGLY DEVOTED TO COPIOUS PICTURES SHOWING "POPULAR DEMONSTRATIONS" WELCOMING RYDBECK ON CONFIDENTIAL

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HIS ARRIVAL IN EL AYOUN.

9. COMMENT: BENHIMA'S REPORTED REMARK ABOUT COMMON EXPLOITATION OF "THE REGION" SEEMS TO RAISE FOR FIRST TIME IN CONTEXT PRESENT CONFLICT POSSIBILITY OF SHARING OF SAHARA WEALTH AS WELL AS -- PRESUMABLY -- GARA DJEBILET RESERVES ON ALGERIAN SIDE. SIGNIFICANTLY ABSENT FROM HIS STATEMENT WAS SPECIFIC MENTION OF BORDER RATIFICATION, WHICH IF GOM WERE TO CONCEDE AT ALL WOULD PROBABLY HAVE TO COME LATE IN NEGOTIATIONS FOR AN OVERALL AGREEMENT. AS WE HAVE REPORTED, OPINION HERE IS BY AND LARGE NEGATIVE ON ANY GOM CONCESSIONS WHICH MIGHT INCLUDE RATIFICATION OF BRODER AGREEMENT. OUR JUDGMENT IS THAT THE KING COULD CARRY OFF EVENTUAL RATIFICATION, BUT HE WOULD HAVE TO ENGINEER IT CAREFULLY AND ALGERIANS WOULD HAVE TO MAKE IT WORTH HIS WHILE.

10. ON THE MILITARY SIDE, SITUATION ON GROUND REMAINS UNCLEAR. WE NOTE FRENCH ASSESSMENT (PARIS 3694) THAT ALGERIANS, IN ABSENCE OF ANY ACCORD, LIKELY TO PURSUE MATTER BY CONTINUING GUERRILLA ACTIVITY IN AREAS OF MOROCCAN CONTROL AND FOCUSING MAIN EFFORT ON WEAKER MAURITANIA. NOUAKCHOTT 319 ALSO SPECULATES THAT FIRM MAY BE DESTINED TO BECOME POLISARIO'S (ALGERIA'S) MAIN TARGET. IN FEB 3 CONVERSATION WITH ALGERIAN EMBOFF HERE, EMBOFF MADE POINT THAT IT WOULD HARDLY SEEM IN "POLISARIO'S" INTEREST TO FORCE GIRM TO TUMBLE, SINCE SUCH A DEVELOPMENT MIGHT ENCOURAGE WORST-CASE SCENARIO SKETCHED IN ALGERIAN PRESS (I.E., FURTHER EXPANSION AT GIRM EXPENSE BY ITS NEIGHBORS). ALGERIAN ACKNOWLEDGED POINT, BUT SAID "VIOLENCE HAS WAY OF DEVELOPING ITS OWN RATIONALE". ON BALANCE, IT SEEMS PLAUSIBLE TO US THAT ALGERIA MAY WELL SEE BEST OPPORTUNITY FOR FENDING OFF MOROCCAN AND MAURITANIAN CONSOLIDATION IN SAHARA IN KNOCKING OUT MAURITANIAN THIRD OF TRIPARTITE ACCORD.

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